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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: DAS BRYZA HONORED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO
BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Matthew Bryza paid his farewell visit as Deputy Assistant Secretary to Georgia August 9-11, meeting with senior officials and receiving a Golden Fleece award from President Saakashvili for his contributions to Georgian-American relations. After the ceremony, Bryza and Saakashvili reviewed the state of Georgia's efforts to avoid further conflict, cooperate with regional partners, and move beyond recent domestic political strife. In separate meetings, Bryza discussed engagement strategy with the Reintegration Minister and National Security Advisor; military reform, the situation along the administrative boundary lines and Russian military capabilities with the Defense and Foreign Ministers; and next steps for the non-parliamentary opposition. Additional meetings with international diplomats and former Prime Minister Lado Gurgendidze will be reported septel. End summary.

PRESIDENT SAKASHVILI AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE

¶2. (U) In a ceremony at the Constitutional Court in Batumi on August 11, President Saakashvili expressed his profound gratitude for DAS Bryza's years of service to Georgian-American relations. He bestowed on him the Order of the Golden Fleece, an award authorized for foreign citizens who have "significantly contributed to the . . . sovereignty and protection of territorial unity, formation of democratic and free society, formation of useful bilateral relationship with foreign countries." DAS Bryza thanked Saakashvili for the honor, noting the impressive progress Georgia has made toward a democratic and market-based society since he began working on the region, the mutually beneficial nature of Georgian-American relations, and the continued commitment of the American government and people to improving that relationship.

¶3. (C) After the ceremony, Saakashvili hosted his mother, Bryza, and the Charge for lunch, at which a range of issues was discussed. Regarding recent provocations along the administrative boundary in the runup to the August 2008 war's anniversary, both agreed that Russia was testing both the patience of Georgia and the resolve of the international community to stand by Georgia in the face of further provocations. While they also agreed Russia was unlikely to take further action in the near future, Saakashvili suggested Russia might try further military action in a year. Both agreed that the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was doing a good job and served an important function. Although he said the EU was unlikely to invite U.S. participation as monitors, Bryza raised the idea that perhaps the U.S. could provide support on some other level, such as with intelligence or analysis; Saakashvili was open to the idea. (Embassy note: Bryza made a similar proposal during a separate meeting to FM Vashadze, who had the same reaction as Saakashvili. End note.) Bryza commended the Georgian government for its efficient construction of homes for persons displaced by the

August 2008 war; Saakashvili noted that the New York Times called it the fastest effort ever to provide shelter for such a population.

¶4. (C) The two also discussed regional affairs, with Bryza noting that both Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian President Sargsian felt somewhat isolated. Saakashvili responded that Georgia currently enjoyed good relations with both countries, with Aliyev being very helpful to Georgia, and the award Saakashvili recently received from Sargsian indicative of the two countries' improving relations. Saakashvili said that he had reached out to both his counterparts, and invited them to visit Georgia, but both had thus far not accepted his invitation. He pointed out, however, that these leaders were not completely isolated, since Aliyev had received a phone call from President Obama, something that he not yet received. He also noted that Armenia wanted to do more, but was always fearful of Russia's reaction. Saakashvili suggested that some kind of regional grouping that did not include Russia would be useful to counteract the influence of their northern neighbor, although he did not offer any specific ideas. Saakashvili also said that Turkmenistan has shown promise as a useful partner for Georgia, and the two countries have been actively engaged in discussions. He noted that Georgian PM Gilauri has been to Ashgabat three times in the past few months.

¶5. (C) Bryza told the President that Irakli Alasania was pleased with his recent meetings with the government, including the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and had said he would continue to work with the government. Bryza noted that these meetings provided a forum to address the allegations of

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violence that arose during and after the protests. Saakashvili agreed that Alasania's engagement was positive. He suggested, however, that Nino Burjanadze's political future was over and accused her of continuing to accept Russian support. Saakashvili made a similar claim about Salome Zourabichvili, suggesting that Russian money was financing her recent PR efforts against the Government in western Europe.

REINTEGRATION MINISTER PONDERES ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

¶6. (C) Bryza also met with Reintegration Minister Temuri Yakobashvili, with whom he discussed possible ways forward on engagement with the separatist regions, in particular Abkhazia. Yakobashvili said the government was in the process of developing a long-term strategy for engagement, which it hoped to complete by the end of the year. He took a long-term view of the situation, which will ultimately depend on Russian domestic developments, such as in the North Caucasus, that will take some time to mature -- "unless Russia collapses tomorrow." Nevertheless, he expressed confidence that "One day, Russia will go" and said the Georgian government would want to be prepared for that day. He sought lessons from other examples of disputed territory, in particular Cyprus but also Northern Ireland and divided Germany, and asked for U.S. input. Some of the areas he saw as offering potential for engagement in the short term were civil society, media, and trade. Yakobashvili expressed strong support for the EUMM, which he called "instrumental" in defusing tensions. Although interested in the idea of having the U.S. provide secondary support to the EUMM, he suggested more direct participation would be better, because the U.S. element would serve both as a deterrent and a tripwire. He said, half-jokingly, that Russia's strong negative reaction to reports of possible U.S. involvement showed how good an idea it was.

NATIONAL SECURITY SECRETARY FOCUSED ON STRATEGIC PATIENCE

¶7. (C) National Security Secretary Eka Tkeshelashvili told DAS Bryza on August 10 that Georgia understands the need for

strategic patience when dealing with the separatist regions. She said that Georgia and its allies need a common strategy for dealing with the territories and argued that the West should use the term "occupation" when referring to Russian troops in Georgia's separatist regions. She said that, legally speaking, it was important to note that Russian forces are in Georgia as occupiers, not as invited peacekeepers. Tkeshelashvili acknowledged that Georgia was still reviewing its own strategies for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but hoped that by September discussions could move forward with Georgia's friends in the West. She agreed with DAS Bryza that Georgia did not want to see Abkhazia and South Ossetia completely isolated. Tkeshelashvili reported that her efforts to develop Georgia's interagency coordination were progressing and she hoped that regular "deputies meetings" would soon begin.

DEFENSE MINISTER REVIEWS MILITARY REFORM, RUSSIAN CAPABILITIES

18. (C) Also on August 10, Minister of Defense Sikharulidze described progress on rationalizing Georgia's military equipment policy, focusing on air defense, anti-tank, and small arms capabilities. Sikharulidze stressed the Georgian MOD's focus on inter-operability and training, including mention of a process for construction of the new defense academy, which MOD hopes to start operating by September 2010. Sikharulidze lobbied for assistance in improvement of Georgia's air defense capabilities, arguing that this would be a deterrent for Russia as well as an important capability (i.e. they will know what they are shooting at, which they reportedly can not discern with current equipment). In general terms, Sikharulidze said that the Georgian military can get its units into defensive positions within 12 hours. Commenting on Russia's recent moves, Sikharulidze noted that the Russians are sending all new military equipment to the North Caucasus region, and that they have far more equipment on the ground than needed by the current troop levels. Sikharulidze commented that the Russians are expanding and rebuilding the road to the Roki tunnel, with the goal of the capability to bring in 30,000 troops in 24 hours. With their current capabilities, Sikharulidze stated that the Russians can reach the outskirts of Tbilisi from their artillery positions in Akhalkalaki.

NON-PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION

19. (C) In separate August 10 meetings, Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement) United Georgia) and Irakli Alasania

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(Our Georgia) Free Democrats) both expressed their concern about what they deemed dubious arrests and incidents of violence against those in political opposition to the GoG. Burjanadze expressed her specific concerns about the case of Amiran Bitsadze, a party member who was severely beaten. Burjanadze said that she did not oppose efforts by some in the non-parliamentary opposition, namely Alasania, to engage the GoG but thought that it would turn out to be largely pointless. Burjanadze said that she did not believe the GoG was committed to taking concrete steps to build trust between political forces.

110. (C) In his meeting, however, Alasania told DAS Bryza that the August 7 meeting at the National Security Council between the GoG and opposition members was very positive. Nevertheless, Alasania said he did not have much faith that the MoIA would be diligent in resolving and investigating past cases. Alasania's priority was to pressure the GoG to halt political arrests and retributions which he believed was an achievable goal. Alasania said he was encouraged by the GoG's recent openness to more pluralistic political engagement and hoped it would continue. He noted that he intended to join the Election Law Working Group and probably the Constitutional Commission, but was working out the details as to how best join both groups.

11. (U) DAS Bryza did not have an opportunity to clear on this cable.

TEFFT